Allow me to join Arlene to thank you for honoring our invitation to attend this meeting. We appreciate you very much and greet with a deep sense of gratitude and pride for granting me this opportunity to explain my mission to the US and share with you my thoughts on events back home. Thanks so much.

I also want to briefly endorse the sentiments expressed by Arlene of me. She said it all in few words. Let me add to what she said that as traditional leader of a population of about 40,000 inhabitants, I am responsible for the preservation of our fine customs and the custodian of our lands. I know for most of you, this is your first time to meet a Paramount Chief. I will be most willing and ready to answer your questions.

Arlene has already told you who we are. I will therefore move to deal with the reasons for my mission to the US and other issues like what we are doing, for whom and why. I am here under the auspices of Arlene and Sherbro Foundation. Sherbro Foundation is helping to promote programs for poverty alleviation in my chiefdom through a number interventions dating since 2013. The programs represent our agenda for poverty alleviation and are developed by my people with strong traditional leadership backup. Our achievements over these years have been encouraging, as you will hear in the course of this presentation. It is always said it’s better to hear from the horse’s mouth. I’m here to do exactly that.

Bumpeh Chiefdom is one of 149 chiefdoms in Sierra Leone. It is rural and poor. Poverty is common to all chiefdoms in Sierra Leone, but Bumpeh Chiefdom is among the poorest. A visitor will quickly see the extent of the effects of poverty on the people and their communities. There are 215 villages in Bumpeh Chiefdom, mostly of 200-300 people. We are a coastal chiefdom of tropical lowland rainforest. The beautiful Bumpeh River travels the length of the chiefdom and enters the sea. The river gives us natural tidal flooding that creates wetlands for abundant rice growing, our chief source of food and livelihood.

Rotifunk is the headquarter town with about 20% of the population. Life is basically the same across the villages and town. In fact, life in Rotifunk is far more unbearable than in the villages because of insufficient land people can depend on for their livelihood. There are very few wage paying jobs in Rotifunk, so the main occupation is petty trading in the weekly market.

Twenty years after Sierra Leone gained Independence in 1961, Bumpeh Chiefdom was considered one of the fast growing chiefdoms. Her communities were enlightened and cherished good family values, had access to quality education for many who could afford it, and even provided for those who could not. It had the best hospital in provincial Sierra Leone, second only to the main gov’t hospital located in Freetown. People in Rotifunk enjoyed pipe-borne water, and for communities away from Rotifunk, their water drinking came mostly from spring water sources that were protected by traditional practices to stop contamination.
The chiefdom enjoyed a reliable railroad, river and road transportation network to and fro. A flourishing trade in local goods provided incomes for many families, while agriculture was gradually enhanced from subsistence to commercial agriculture. These and other attributes attracted many people in and outside Sierra Leone to visit or migrate to the chiefdom resulting to the chiefdom becoming the most populated in the Moyamba District today.

Sadly, we witnessed a consistent decline starting in the early 80’s leading to a state of abject poverty of our chiefdom. Briefly, the principle reasons were bad governance, marginalization and disregard of traditional authority and structures, corruption, the economic recession in the late 80’s, the ten years rebel war and recently, the Ebola virus epidemic.

With the exception of Rotifunk, a typical village in Bumpeh Chiefdom has a range of 100-1000 inhabitants. The houses are made of mud wattle, mud bricks and thatched roofs. They are constructed with little or no precautions against fire, snakes, etc. It goes without saying, there’s no electricity in the chiefdom.

Women are cooking on three stones with wood, and carrying firewood is an everyday chore.

Good drinking water is difficult to come by. Very few villages have wells. They must get water from streams that dry up in the hot dry season. Children have to carry water long distances.

Subsistence farming is the order of the day and done manually with primitive tools. Rice farming is the main focus. Productivity is low with no gov’t subsidies as you have in the US. Rice farming pictures...Women carry the burden of farming – making palm oil, etc.

Education in the chiefdom is no good story to tell. There are no teaching materials and very few qualified teachers. Schools are often primitive and overcrowded. Some schools may take place in open air structures that become nonfunctional in the rainy season. Even to attend these schools, children are walking four, six, and even eight miles each way.

Only 40% of school age children go to school, and many drop out before they get to secondary school. Secondary school is only available in Rotifunk.

Transportation in and out of the chiefdom is horrible. There’s little available public transportation and the vehicles are falling apart. It takes 4-5 hours to cover 55 miles from Rotifunk to the capital, Freetown. With the rising cost of fuel, river transportation with motorized boats is too expensive for most people. Consequently, getting to other parts of the chiefdom is by foot and by dugout canoes.

Health care is poor in a country with the highest maternal and infant mortality rates in the world. Bumpeh Chiefdom’s mortality rates are among the highest in the country. It has no functional hospital although the rebel-burnt hospital is rebuilt and being equipped to reopen. Only six poorly equipped and staffed health clinics serve 40,000 people.

Against this background, we resolved as a chiefdom 6 years ago on my 25\textsuperscript{th} anniversary as Paramount Chief of the chiefdom to kick start our development with measures that can usher change and assure
the sustained growth of the chiefdom. Our goal is to regain the lost glory of our chiefdom. This explains our vision and mission that gear toward creating a society where:

1. People lead their own development with best traditional skills and cultures.
2. The rights of people, particularly women and children, are protected and enjoyed with dignity.
3. We maintain a strong belief that man and his environment are inseparable. They must co-exist with each other.

Our programs have been designed to address our vision and mission under three broad categories. We started with scholarships for girls’ education to stop the growing disparity between girls and boys, who are much favored. So far we have given nearly 500 scholarships to over 250 girls in five secondary schools.

Some of the girls started enjoying scholarships from junior secondary school level one. Because of these scholarships, girls’ enrollment has increased and the girls are doing very well in public exams.

We have also supported adult literacy programs for women who dropped out of school and are now interested to advance themselves. Many are just learning to read and write. Classes focus on functional literacy, and teach the women to become more productive in their small trading businesses. They can now also follow their children’s performance in school and help them. More importantly, they are able to open and operate bank accounts, something they previously avoided as illiterates. The impact of the adult program has been encouraging and impressive. Plans are well underway to start also classes for drop-outs who left school due to parents’ financial constraints and teenage pregnancy.

A milestone achievement for my chiefdom is starting the computer training program. Computer literacy will build wage-paying job skills in students and adults now coming from a subsistence agriculture environment. It will also provide talent to stimulate growth of small businesses in this rural community.

We started the program in the living room of a borrowed house. During the Ebola crisis, we worked to build a new community computer center from a rebel-burned structure provided by the chiefdom. The transformation was remarkable. The building will house computer training, adult literacy and other classes.

We wanted to move to longer term solutions for education. We set a goal that in 12 years every baby born will have access to secondary school education. To do this, we are opening education savings accounts for each newborn baby. To date, we have opened 2000 baby accounts. We give parents three fruit trees to plant to encourage parents to add to their child’s savings account with income from the trees’ fruit. This builds on an old tradition of planting a tree with the baby’s umbilical cord. To ensure the accounts sufficiently grow, we are also planting dedicated baby plantations with fruit that can be harvested in 1-2 years like bananas, pineapples and guava, and then adding longer term fruit trees.
We are using our existing agriculture skills as a tool for empowering people in their communities to be self-sufficient. Our programs in this equation aspire to provide a reliable source of income for people and their communities to undertake development and meet the cost of educating their children.

We recognized immediately following Ebola, we needed a short term effort to help farm families get back on their feet. The fastest way for farmers to earn quick income is by growing vegetables as cash crops. We decided to focus on women, and their choice was to grow groundnuts – for Americans, these are peanuts.

Sherbro Foundation immediately responded with funding, and women were harvesting a bumper crop of groundnuts within five months. This program was an unqualified success. We are continuing with this program to give more women opportunities to earn money and add to their children’s education savings accounts. We provide seed, fertilizer, training and a 50Kg bag of rice to feed their families before their harvest.

For communities to be self-sufficient in the long term, we’re helping villages to grow community fruit orchards. These will fund children’s education and community development projects, like building health clinics, digging wells and constructing roads.

To start this, we created our own fruit tree nurseries. We buy local fruit and collect the seed to grow tree seedlings in these nurseries at little cost. We supply villages with 2000 tree seedlings to grow their village fruit orchards. Villages provide 10 acres of community land and the labor to clear and plant their orchard. They receive training and monthly project monitoring to ensure success. Lost trees are replanted early to maximize survival of mature orchards.

Orchards with 2000 trees maturing in 4-5 years will produce $20,000 or more in annual income for years to come. To date, six villages have planted orchards and two nurseries have grown 40,000 seedlings, including mango, orange, grapefruit, avocado, plum, guava, cashew, coconut and oil palm.

We plan to expand the program around the chiefdom and be a model for other chiefdoms to emulate. Over time, we expect to become a fruit growing district that supports growth of fruit-based cottage industries.

Environmental protection is an important element of our program. We are creating a forest reserve system to ensure chiefdom natural resources of land, water and wildlife are productive today and protected for future generations. Forest reserves are being established that protect drinking water sources, hold water tables, control erosion and flooding, provide refuge for land animals & fish nurseries, and help fight global warming.

In the next five years, we plan to protect 15 areas as forest reserves and reforesting two areas with hardwood trees. We believe this approach is in keeping with our vision to make man and the environment inseparable. When people protect the land, the land in turn protects people and their futures.
Our programs are simple and achievable because they are community driven, cost effective and dependent only on local manpower and materials. How does work actually get done? I created a community based organization to lead and manage the programs. It’s the only community based organization of its kind in the country that has its mandate from chiefdom authorities. This use of chiefdom authorities allows us to systematically reach the smallest villages that the government and other aid organizations never reach. These make the difference.

The organization is called the Center for Community Empowerment and Transformation or CCET. They are mainly teachers who live and work in the community and volunteer their time. Their role is to design, introduce and monitor programs. CCET is overseen by a local board comprised of community leaders and program beneficiaries.

Our approach promotes local initiatives and allows full community participation. Traditional leaders create an environment for smooth program implementation and follow the execution. They negotiate needed community land and labor. They enact and enforce community bylaws related to these programs.

I have managed to take you through the work we are doing and I am proud to inform you that we are making a difference already. We have accomplished big things in a short time under difficult circumstances. Ebola was one such setback. I cannot conclude this presentation if I don’t talk about the dreadful disease outbreak. It took us by surprise and we knew very little about it. Even our medics. We were short of knowledge to deal with it. As a result, many of our doctors, health workers died in the process.

The most difficult challenge in this fight was to break the chain of transmission. The earliest strategy adopted proved ineffective because the emphasis was on hygiene and sanitation which was inadequate to deal with this high-risk virus. The virus prevented people from attending to their natural instincts – caring for the sick, burying the dead, worshipping together, and any public gathering for schooling or to do business. Under such circumstances, the best approach to break the chain of transmission in our context was to manage behavior. The chiefs understood this as the best option since they were closest to the people and the best positioned to lead change. The government and Int’l NGO’s didn’t understand that the transmission of the virus was a behavioral act. They were reactive and focused on treating already sick people, and the epidemic continued to escalate.

Only when chiefs across the country came together and developed a mechanism to regulate high risk behaviors did the epidemic decline. The two most important behavioral changes were to stop people carrying the virus from entering chiefdoms and stopping unsafe burials. I quickly enacted these changes, and within weeks we stopped the transmission of the virus in our chiefdom. This approach was then adopted nationwide in mid-December 2014, and within four weeks the country’s new Ebola case rate dropped 80%.
We were able to implement our strategies to break the transmission through funds provided by Sherbro Foundation. This included erecting checkpoints to stop people entering with the virus, door-to-door daily surveillance, and facilitating my traveling with the Ebola committee across the chiefdom to regiment and enforce the process.

Our role and experiences gained in the fight against Ebola strengthened our ability to deal with emerging issues that have the tendency to derail our progress. Therefore, we are confident about building a prosperous future as we fight to break barriers to development. We are also confident that you’ll be by us since we share a common aspiration to serve mankind.

I hope I’ve led you through to knowing us more, what we do, for whom and where we are headed to. Therefore, at this point, I will pause to let you ask questions.